

The Ballarat Naturalist

October 2012



2012 Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture

Geoff Park delivered the lecture to about 50 members and Guests.

Flora and fauna of the Newstead area.

With an opening photograph of Frogmore Swamp, Geoff indicated that he likes helping others to understand the natural environment and pointed out that he sees an important part of this being, sharing his regular observations around Newstead with others by putting daily observations on his Naturally Newstead website. He referred to a Gilbert White who lived from 1720 to 1793 and who over an extended period documented what he saw every day in the area around Selbourne in the United Kingdom. These records can now be viewed on the web and make for interesting comparisons with current times.

According to Geoff, it is claimed that Newstead is in the geographical centre of Victoria. An interesting observation considering that those who attended the SEANA gathering at Bendigo would have noticed a sign near Mandurang claiming similar notoriety. Anyway, there is not a great distance between.

Displaying a map of the Newstead area, it was explained that there are three environments in the area. The Box Ironbark is a strong feature with areas on public and on privately owned land. Secondly there are rivers and creeks including the Loddon River and the Muckleford Creek. There are also the plains with wetlands west of Newstead.

Geoff discussed each of the landscapes, illustrating the points made with photographs each labelled with the location and date taken. The variety of photographs and the areas around Newstead covered were impressive but it was also impressive that most of the photos had been taken over the previous year with many only within the last few months. This left the

impression that the ordinary observer could go to the areas mentioned and see similar things.

The first landscape covered was Rivers and Creeks. Features of this landscape are the Loddon River, Cairn Curran reservoir, and the Muckleford gorge which was highlighted in a very recent photograph taken in August 2012. A February 2006 photo showed a dry Loddon river and there was one in 2008 showing Cairn Curran reservoir empty. People wondered if the river would ever flow again. But as we know, January 2011 saw the biggest flood and September 2011 saw Cairn Curran 96% full.

There was an October 2011 photo of a white bellied sea eagle. Most of Geoff's photos were of birds and those in this landscape included whistling kites, great egret, masked lapwing, white faced heron, little pied and little black cormorant, darter, and pelican. Also notable were nankeen night heron which could be seen 200m down the Loddon from the Newstead bridge and a powerful owl on the Loddon at Newstead.

The second landscape was the box ironbark woodlands. Areas discussed included the Muckleford forest and a place with the catchy title Rise and Shine reserve which is 5-6km south of Newstead off Ramsays Lane towards Franklinford. Again, most photos were of birds. There were captivating photos of grey shrike thrush, scarlet robin, flame robin, eastern yellow robin, little lorikeets, musk lorikeets, purple crowned lorikeet, yellow tufted and fuscous honeyeaters, eastern spinebill, white browed babblers, hooded robin, crested bellbirds, varied sitella, diamond firetail, owlet nightjar, kookaburra, buff rumped thornbill, brown thornbill, southern whiteface, spotted pardalote, speckled warbler, shining bronze cuckoo, horsefields cuckoo, rainbow lorikeet, white browed woodswallows, and crimson rosella. Again photos were taken over a period of less than 12 months.

It was then on to plains wetlands. Here mention was made of Long Swamp which was drained in the sixties. The swamp is mainly on private land with a small amount owned by the Trust for Nature. The Catchment Management Authority has a project to remove the drain and indications are that four owners are interested in selling the land for conservation purposes. This area has been a flocking site for brolgas. Walkers swamp was also mentioned and a photo taken on 16th December 2010 showed it with lots of water.

Photos taken in areas associated with plains wetlands and shown included Lignum swamp in January 2011, black shouldered kite, brown falcon, nankeen kestrel, spotted harrier, sulphur crested cockatoo, brown quail, straw necked ibis, black winged stilt, purple swamphen, grey teal, chestnut teal, brolga and yellow spoon bill.

Geoff's photographs were a delight to the eye and accompanied by background information about the locality his talk made easy enjoyable listening while passing on the message that Newstead had many areas of ecological value that were well worth visiting with the likelihood of sightings of a great variety of birds. Thanks to Geoff for the presentation which clearly demonstrated that there was plenty to see around Newstead.

Peter Dalman

Excursion: Wattles and Canadian Forest.

This excursion was planned for this time so we could appreciate the beauty of our wattles, some local, some from further afield but most flowering at their peak or close to it. Our publication about local wattles has increased our interest in identifying wattles. This has been a good season and along many roads the displays are spectacular. Gregurkes and Dalmans chose a few places en route to and in Creswick to look at and, of course we did not restrict our observations to wattles. In the afternoon we joined with members of the Australian Plants Society in the Canadian Forest area. We began with a stop along Jubilee Road at a beautiful roadside of planted wattles amongst kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*). Ploughshare wattle (*A. gunnii*) was the only local variety with the others local to other places. These include Cootamundra (*A. baileyana*), Early black (*A. decurrens*), Sticky (*A. howittii*), Sallow (*A. longifolia*), Ovens (*A. pravissima*) and Cedar (*A. elata*) not yet flowering. Further along this road was Wirilda (*A. provincialis*).

A walk beside a railway line led to perhaps the most beautiful Golden wattle (*A. pycnantha*) I remember seeing. This example makes sense why it was selected to be our national floral emblem. Birds observed here included chough, crested pigeon, blue wren, magpie, red browed finch, galah, bronzewing pigeon, crimson rosella, wood duck and kookaburra.

We moved to Long Point reserve along Gillies Road. This formerly much -mined area will soon be flowering better but on our wattle quest we found Silver wattle (*A. dealbata*), Early black, Thin-leaf (*A. aculeatissima*) and Hedge (*A. paradoxa*) all in bud and Sallow flowering. Of other interest



here are numerous Silver banksia (*B. marginata*), many quite large and mature but really of all ages. A few fungi were found and some flowers which included Pink bells (*Tetratheca ciliata*), Early nancy (*Wurmbea latifolia*) and Common hovea (*H. heterophylla*).

Photo: *Blackwood (Acacia melanoxylon)*

The next stop was at Mendhams dam along a road of the same name which we found by chance. None of us has visited this area before and since it has been burnt it shows great promise for a return visit in about a month when it may be a carpet of lilies, orchids, daisies and more. We found Grass trigger plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*), Early nancy and Scented sundews (*Drosera whittakeri*) flowering but were disappointed to see a huge area of watsonia growing vigorously in a swampy patch. Frogs could be heard calling amongst the reeds.

We went to Creswick for lunch driving along the creek which has caused so much recent flooding and is lined with brightly flowering wattles. We drove around St. Georges Lake along the north side. This passes a private garden with a lovely display of wattles as well as other native plants.

Before arriving at the lunch stop we saw Black wattle (*A. mearnsii*), Sallow wattle, Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*), Golden wattle and numerous hardenbergiass - one huge patch. As we enjoyed lunch in the sun we were surrounded by wattles, in particular a magnificent Snowy River wattle (*A. boormanii*), some Prickly Moses (*A. verticillata*), Cedar wattle and others mentioned earlier.

Leaving Creswick we stopped briefly to admire a prostrate form of Cootamundra which a home gardener has used to cover a sloping bank along with a grevillea.

In the morning 15 species of wattles were seen flowering and three or four in bud. For those who want a detailed list of where wattles are seen, John

has a nicely- presented list.

In the afternoon most of the group drove to a nominated part of the Canadian Forest along Cathies Road and joined members of the Australian Plants Society as well as a couple more Field Nats. Roger Thomas led this excursion along with John Clark, an APS member who has been observing and photographing this area for a couple of years.

Before we even left the cars we were impressed by very tall and healthy specimens of Tall greenhoods (*Pterostylis melagramma*). A. patch of miners' lettuce, a *Claytonia* which is a weed caught our eye. Some sampled it and found it fairly bland but it would have been a welcome salad green for miners. Along the way we saw more tall greenhoods and some Nodding greenhoods (*P. nutans*). At one spot these were unusually tall, one estimated at about 33cm.

We added the Hop wattle (*A. stricta*) to our flowering wattle list, along with Common heath (*Epacris impressa*) of several colours, Slender Rice flower (*Pimelia linifolia*), Common Rice flower (*P. humilis*), pink bells, hovea, Sweet bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), Grey everlasting (*Ozothamnus obcordata*), Silky daisy (*Olearia myrsinoides*), Twining fringe lily (*Thysanotus parviflorus*) and some impressive bracket fungus on a log.

Perhaps the most unusual plants were ferns which Roger showed us. These are not found commonly around Ballarat and are only found here because they are always damp due to a leak from a dam higher up. The plants are very healthy and robust-looking. They are Soft water-fern (*Blechnum minus*), Fishbone water-fern (*Blechnum nudum*), Soft tree fern (*Dicksonia Antarctica*) and Ruddy ground-fern (*Hypolepis rugulosa*).



Some members finished a pleasant day at the invitation of John and Joyce Clarke at their home for afternoon tea. It was great to see their garden. We have seen photos of it and indeed they have squeezed in a vast range of native plants, all growing splendidly under John's expert care. Fon Ryan thanked them and after a last look at their inspirational garden the day ended.

Photo:Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), flowers

Claire Dalman

To celebrate our 60th anniversary
come to the Moorabool Reservoir Lodge for a BBQ lunch
on Sat 17th Nov commencing at 12 noon.

There are facilities under cover at the Lodge.
Members to bring their own meat for the BBQ, and
to bring a salad or a dessert to share among our members and guests.
Tea & coffee will be provided but bring your own drinks and glasses.

A walk in nearby area may be organised
Please RSVP by Friday October 26th for catering purposes
at Oct club meeting, by mail or club email
(See page 8 for addresses)

Pyrenees Gum

John Higgins, chairman of Avoca and District Landcare Group, supplied the following information.

The first examples of the rare and beautiful Pyrenees Gum ever to be cultivated are expected to be released to the public in autumn 2012. The Pyrenees Gum (*Eucalyptus pyreneae*) was first identified as a previously unknown species in 2001, and formally recognised as a new species in 2004 after seedlings were cultivated for study at the National Herbarium of Victoria.

It is one of four closely-related species with a close affinity to the Mountain Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) of Gippsland and south-eastern New South Wales, which was first described in 1962. It has been found only in the Pyrenees, and even then, only at an altitude between 425 and 475 metres.

Until October 2011, it had been reported only above Ampitheatre, but subsequent research by members of Avoca and District Landcare Group located numbers of the tree on the eastern side of the Pyrenees just above the Avoca lookout.

Parks Victoria, which had no knowledge of the tree until shown by Avoca Landcare last year, described it as “particularly elegant tree”. *E. pyreneae* apparently rarely grows more than 25 metres in height, compared to *E. cypellocarpa* which grows to about 60 metres. However it is

expected that grown at lower levels in cultivation, the Pyrenees Gum is unlikely to grow to more than half the height it attains in nature, making it ideal for parks and streetscape planting, and even suitable for larger gardens.

Seeds taken from trees in October 2011 failed to germinate, but more than 300 seedlings have been grown from seed taken from a fallen tree found at the start of November.

These seedlings have now grown as high as 30cm, and already suggest that in cultivation, the Pyrenees Gum will retain the dense, spreading and shady crown of glossy dark green leaves which it displays in the wild.

The first 24 Pyrenees Gum will be offered to Pyrenees Shire Council to be planted in Avoca and all communities in the shire, in the hope the tree will be used as a promotional tool as Bendigo used the Wirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*). The Pyrenees Gum will be featured in an arboretum which will be planted on the former school plantation site off Vinoca Road, Avoca.

Avoca Landcare has appealed for donations of old plant pots for cultivating trees and shrubs for the arboretum. Pots can be left at Eurabbie Estate winery, Avoca. People wanting to purchase Pyrenees Gums can also order seedlings from Eurabbie Estate. Funds raised will pay for trees being cultivated for the arboretum.

John Higgins will lead the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat on an excursion to the Pyrenees Forest on Sunday March 3rd 2013. We look forward to seeing the Pyrenees Gum growing in its natural habitat.

John Gregurke

Congratulations

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat

on

Our 60th Anniversary

CALENDAR 2012

OCTOBER

- Fri 5 Steve Williams, Entomologist *Raising caterpillars to moths*
Sat 6 *Brisbane Ranges* - Elspeth Swan & Paul Norquay
Week 13-21 Australian Naturalists Network - Canberra
**Committee Meeting, 6pm Fri Nov. 2 prior to Club meeting

November

- Fri 2 Mike Wicks, *Grasslands*
Sun 4 Beaufort Area Grasslands - Mike Wicks.
Sat 17 60th Anniversary Bbq lunch, Moorabool Reservoir Lodge

Committee

President..... Peter Dalman
Vice –President Fran Hanrahan
Secretary..... Carol Hall
Treasurer Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman.....	Val Hocking
John Gregurke.....	John Mildren
Elspeth Swan	

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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